

Technical session II

Wetland conservation and the Ramsar CEPA Programme

Communication, Education, and Public Awareness (CEPA) is now well recognized in international programmes as a set of social tools essential for effective environmental management. For example, the Mekong River Commission notes “Involvement of public and the public opinion in the work of MRC is believed to be a prerequisite for the overall aim and vision of the Mekong Agreement”, and the Asian Development Bank has adopted a *Water for All* policy that includes fostering participation and communication as one of seven key elements. Within their work programmes both institutions invest considerable resources to develop and use CEPA tools wherever necessary to achieve their objectives.

The Ramsar Convention also recognises the value of CEPA through Resolution VIII.31 and its annexed guidelines. In addition, CEPA has been identified as one of two key cross-cutting areas in the work of the Convention.

The CEPA guidelines include three General Objectives

- Gain acceptance of the value and effectiveness of wetland-related CEPA processes at all levels throughout the Convention;
- Provide support and tools for the effective national and local implementation of wetland-related CEPA activities;
- Mainstream the wise use of wetlands within society and enable people to act.

These are associated with 38 actions that identify key activities for various actors (such as Contracting Parties (CPs), Ramsar’s International Organization Partners, the Ramsar Secretariat, NGOs and others).

In looking at CEPA activities around the Asia region, it is clear that these objectives are being met, at least in part, through a great diversity of activities in many countries, and that the value of CEPA tools in wetland management is recognised, although not necessarily given the priority or funding it deserves. In this presentation it will only be possible to consider a few of the actions suggested by the guidelines and highlight a few examples of CEPA activities that illustrate their implementation.

Under General Objective 3:

Action: *Foster sustained national campaigns, programmes and projects to raise community awareness of the vital ecosystem services of wetlands as well as their social, economic and cultural values*

There is abundant evidence in the region of short-term awareness-raising activities at the local and site level, such as the great diversity of activities that take place each year on World Wetlands Day. And there are of course many examples of longer-term activities, such as the WWF-Danone/Evian sponsored *Wetland Ambassadors* project that mobilises and trains young people to

deliver the wetland message at the local level, and the development by the Secretariat of Ramsar's Water Game on the relationship between water and wetlands, currently being tested in all Ramsar regions and soon to be more widely available.

It is worth emphasising that raising awareness is required at all levels: the Mekong River Commission, for example, has developed a river awareness kit, a user-friendly, interactive, self-learning training tool aimed at decision makers, policy advisors and MRC staff; in Nepal, IUCN, WWF and the Ramsar Administrative Authority jointly organised a sensitization programme on wetlands for environmental journalists.

Action: *Support and develop mechanisms to ensure that CEPA processes are incorporated into participatory multi-stakeholder wetland management.*

Participatory management involving local communities is becoming increasingly important in wetland management throughout the Ramsar world. It is a social instrument with CEPA tools underpinning its effective delivery, such as identifying and working with stakeholders; conflict resolution etc.

Examples from Kuala Gula in Malaysia, through the work of Wetlands International, from Dongting Lake in China, through the work of WWF, and the well documented work at Chilika Lake in India by the Development Authority, emphasize the successful role that CEPA tools can play in developing effective participatory wetland management at the site level.

Actions: *Seek to establish education centres at Ramsar and other wetland sites to provide focal points for local and national CEPA activities; Encourage their participation in the Wetland Link International (WLI) network as a mechanism for gaining access to global and national expertise in CEPA.*

The guidelines recognise wetland education centres as a cornerstone of the CEPA Programme. The WLI network is developing at a pace, although funding remains a limiting factor. National networks within the global network are proving effective (e.g. in Australia) and there are plans underway this summer to develop an Asian regional network.

Under General Objective 1

Action: *Ensure that CEPA is integrated into all Convention work programmes and into all further Ramsar guidance; Establish an STRP CEPA Working Group to assist in this.*

A CEPA Working Group has been set up and is interacting with the technical experts within STRP – the body that oversees the development of Ramsar's technical guidance – to identify critical CEPA tools in future guidance. One key area of Ramsar guidance for COP9 will be *An integrating framework for Ramsar's suite of water-related guidance* which notes: "If the needs of wetlands are to be adequately integrated into water resources management planning and implementation, then wetland managers must enter the "water debate" and get involved, through cooperative planning and management processes, in water allocation and water management decision-making."

Entering this debate can require many CEPA skills such as stakeholder analysis, conflict management, negotiation skills, effective reporting to stakeholders, targeted awareness raising etc. Many of these skills are already built into the wetland manager training courses being organized

by our partners from the Netherlands, RIZA-WATC/IAC, but they also need to be effectively built into national training schemes for managers and decision-makers.

Under General Objective 2

Actions: *Nominate CEPA Government and NGO Focal Points; Focal Points should work with a task force to review wetland CEPA needs and priorities, and from this develop a CEPA Action Plan.*

How can CEPA processes be more effectively built into national wetland management? Parties are encouraged to consider developing national CEPA Action Plans. An advantage of such an approach is that it provides a more strategic approach to building CEPA tools into wetland management and training within a country. Additionally, developing a plan brings together a wide range of wetland actors, benefiting from their experiences as well as their perspectives, and potentially bringing greater funding opportunities.

Action planning is proving to be challenging at the national level. Some Parties are having more success with gaining experience at the site level in developing an action plan or building CEPA actions effectively into site management plans, so this bottom-up approach is proving useful. Thailand, for example, has had considerable success doing this at the Krabi Estuary and Nong Bong Khai Non-hunting Area Ramsar sites. Similarly, there are examples of catchment level and state level plans that are useful models.

To conclude: CEPA should not be considered an add-on in wetland conservation. It's an integral part of wetland management - so investing in CEPA is not an option, it's an essential!

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